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ABSTRACT

English as a second dialect (ESD) students are those who have developed linguistic patterns from their parents and other members of their cultural milieu. Since the ESD students seldom find themselves in a setting that demands the use of standard English, they come to higher education with a well developed linguistic pattern that is alien to academia. To teach composition in standard English, the teacher must convey to the students that their present language structure is a legitimate and viable one, but that academia and the business world require standard English. With the ESD student, the initial emphasis in teaching composition should be on verbalization in standard English, and not on the organization of ideas themselves. Some prewriting techniques that can be used include establishing an adequate oral background in standard English through role-playing and translating or rewriting the sentences so generated into standard English. In order to help the students to understand clearly what is meant by writing in standard English, they should be asked to write on the same topic in their regular dialect during one session, and at a subsequent date write another essay on the same topic in standard English. To teach standard English composition to ESL students, then, one must recognize the existence of dialect, distinguish the dialect from standard English, make students aware of the underlying conscious state of standard English, present opportunity for oral practice in standard English, indicate that writing is different from oral discourse, and emphasize writing and proofreading in standard English. (HOD)

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Techniques for Teaching Standard English Composition to English as a Second Dialect Students

Thomas O. Edwards

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"Techniques for Teaching Standard English Composition to English as a Second Dialect Students"

Who is an English as a Second Dialect (ESD) Student? An ESD student is an individual who has developed linguistic patterns from his/her parents and other members of his/her cultural milieu. These linguistic patterns are markedly distinct from the patterns of the majority community, yet due to familiarity and constant interactions, individuals from both linguistic backgrounds have been able to develop the necessary resources that enable them to communicate adequately with each other, primarily because of a common societal frame of reference. Whereas the ESD students have been able to develop their receptive skills due to their exposure to the multi-media of the mainstream culture such as radio, television, and education, where their roles as students have been principally a passive one, that is from a linguistic point of view, these same ESD individuals have not been afforded the opportunity to develop their productive skills in Standard English. Therefore, the ESD students become proficient receptors for both their dialect and Standard English as they interact and mature in the present society; on the other hand, the ESD students seldom find themselves in a setting which demands the use of Standard English, and as a result, they come to higher education with a well-developed linguistic pattern that is alien to academia, and for the first time in their lives, they are required to use Standard English, productively.

More specifically, what are the ESD language patterns? Many Black Americans speak Black English which has been postulated as having its own grammar and logic which are rather distinct from Standard English (Dillard, 1972; Labov, 1972).

There are primary linguistic differences between Black Standard English (Smitherman, 1977). The most obvious difference between Black and Standard English is in pronunciation. For example, the /th/ sound in Black English is pronounced as

/d/ or /f/, depending on its position within the word. The word, "then", with the /th/ sound in the initial position would be pronounced "den", whereas the final /th/ sound as in "mouth" would be pronounced as "mouf". On the other hand, a voiceless /th/ sound as in the word "though" would be pronounced the same as in Standard English.

Other differences in pronunciation involve deletions of certain sounds such as: /r/ in "during" = "doing", "more" = "mow"; /l/ in "help" = "hep", ("will = "wi"); several final consonants as in "hood" = "hoo"; "test" = "tes". Further, the vowel /i/ plus /ng/ in words such as "thing", "ring", and "sing" become "thang", "rang", and "sang",respectively. There are some of the more salient features in pronunciation which distinguish Black English from Standard English.

However, the greatest linguistic differences between Black and Standard English are on the level of grammatical structure. Syntactically, in Black English, a "be/non-be" rule operates. The presence of "be" (also "bees" and "bes") denotes a condition that occurs habitually; while on the other hand, the absence of "be" indicates that the event or condition is one that does not recur. For instance,

"The train bees crowded" means that Every day the
train is crowded, and

"The train crowded" means that Today or now the
train is crowded.

Note that the use of "be/non-be" in Black English corresponds to the use of the conjugated forms of the infinitive "to be" in Standard English.

Black English speakers use "been" to express past action that has recently been completed. A speaker of Black English would say,

"She been late twice this semester" but not
"She been late twice last semester" because

"this semester" indicates recent past action, while "last semester" expresses past action, distantly past action.

Another distinguishing characteristic of Black English is its lack of verb markers; that is, the same verb form is used for all subjects, singular or plural. Usually, the subject and number of the verb are marked by the context of the sentence or by some other word in the sentence. There are definitely the concepts of plurality and possession in Black English, but the additions of (s) for plural and ('s) for possession do not exist. To illustrate,

"Two girl just left the room" and

"Mr. Brown store got burned down"

are sentences which show plurality (two) and possession (the position of Mr. Brown in the second sentence).

Black English speakers place emphasis on the subjects of sentences. For example, "The teachers, they git mad if we talk in class". As exemplified in the preceding sentence, the repetition of the subject in the form of the pronoun "they" is characteristic of Black English.

In Black English there is no concept of double negatives as in Standard English. The rules for negation in Black English are as follows, along with examples:

If the statement consists of only one clause, negate every item;

"Don't nobody never help me do my work" corresponds to Standard English

"No one ever helps me do my work"

If the statement consists of two or more clauses combined as one sentence, all negatives indicate "positives":

"It ain nobody I can't trust" corresponds to the positive statement statement in Standard English,

"I can trust everyone"

And all negatives plus one positive indicate "negatives";

"It ain nobody I can trust" equals the negative statement in Standard English

"I can trust no one"

Other differences between Standard and Black English in grammatical structure include over-generalization of the /s/ rule,

"They does or three childrens"

omission of the /ed/ in the past ense or past participle construction,

"I look for him all day yesterday" and

"This guy I know name Malcolm"

and "done" used by itself to indicate past action,

"I done my homework yesterday" corresponds to

"I did my homework yesterday"

Now that we are familiar with some of the linguistic characteristics of the ESD student, how does one provide the necessary instructions in order to teach composition in Standard English?

First of all, one must convey to the student that his present language structure is a legitimate and viable one, but academia and the business and professional world require Standard English. Consequently, in order to succeed in college, the student must learn and become proficient in Standard English.

Generally, in learning language skills, one progresses from listening to speaking to reading to writing. Another conceptualization of the language arts is to group them according to comprehension (that is, listening and reading) and production (speaking and writing). The instructor must remain conizant of the fact that, for the ESD student, all skills must be taught simultaneously; however, since we are concerned with the productive skill of writing, more attention will be given to that area.

Before one engages in writing, which is the most advanced and demanding skill of the language arts, he must be able to verbalize his thoughts. With eht ESD student, the initial emphasis in teaching compositon is verbalization in Standard English, and not organization of ideas themselves. In essence, how does the ESD student express his/her thoughts in Standard English? The problem obviously at this juncture is one of form and not content.

There are several pre-writing techniques that must be used with the ESD students.

First of all, the ESD student must establish an adequate oral language background in Standard English. This oral language facility can be accomplished by utilizing several activities. At all times the instructor will use the present language knowledge that the students possess in order to teach Standard English. One major pre-writing technique is role-playing. Students will be asked to participate in various roles, some of which will be related to their own environment and demand the use of their dialect. The other type of role will involve a formal business setting and demand the use of Standard English. However, the use of different dialects is not the only objective of this role-playing technique. Further analyses will be made of the dialogue and interaction. The students will note the casual, relaxed, free-flowing style, used with their dialect, which is indicative of an underlying consciousness. That is, the use of their dialect stems from a cultural and psychological frame of reference which gives greater emphasis to the message conveyed in communication rather than the style or form of the message. No judgment of the individual is made from his manner of speaking the dialect. On the other hand, the Standard English role-playing will be analyzed in terms of the guarded, reserved, and precise nature of the dialogue which also represents a particular state of consciousness. This consciousness is significantly distinct from the state of consciousness expressed in the students' dialect. Therefore, in learning Standard English one is also learning new cultural and interactional patterns.

Once this concept is fully understood by the students, then they can begin to practice with phonological and syntactical items that contrast with their dialect. For example, the students will be presented with sentences in their dialect and asked to translate or re-write them in Standard English. This issue is not correctness or incorrectness, since the sentences are all correct depending upon the particular

dialect. E.D. Hirsch, Jr. in "The Philosophy of Composition" states "To assert, therefore, that any oral dialect is 'incorrect' is to state a linguistic prejudice which has no foundation in linguistict fact. Every dialect follows its own rules, and every competent native speaker of the dialect speaks it correctly. Correctness is an internal feature of a particular dialect, not an arbitrary standard which exists outside of the dialect".

To illustrate contrastive features in Black English and Standard English, note the following sentences:

	Black English	Standard English
1)	James study very hard.	James studies very diligently.
2)	He reading the English book.	He is reading the English text.
3)	His brother be working every night	His brother works every night.
4)	Mary done finish that.	Mary has finished her assignment.
5)	This they new car?	Is this their new car?

Note that the dialect forms differ from the Standard English forms not only in syntax or grammatical form but also in specificity of diction. The reason for this additional contrast is to highlight the fact that ehre are two language systems with two underlying states of consciousness and one is not an aberration nor bastardized or sophisticatd form of the other. Geneva Smitherman in a recent interview in the Black Collegian indicates "Linguists differentiate between structural and non-structural phenomena structural phenomena deal with grammar and sound. Non-structural phenomena deal with the consciousness, the cultural aspects involved with speaking the language".

Once the students begin to see that Standard English is a completely new form of discourse, then they can be given additional drill and practive, exclusively with the Standard English forms. Of course, the emphasis here would be to highlight areas in which their own dialect provide greater interference.

Fortunately, at Medgar Evers College, we have a Computer Assisted Instruction Curriculum, developed by the Computer Curriculum Corporation, which provides drill and practive exercises in several language skill that must be mastered by the ESD students. For example, there are exercises in subject-verb agreement with particular emphasis on the verbs "to be", "to have", and "to do". In addition, the principal parts of verb are covered. Ther are five different lessons and exercises concerned with double negatives, which of course, is a characteristic feature of Black English.

After these pre-writing and oral skills are developed, then the instructor can begin to teach composition to the ESD students. The ESD students must be instructed to write in Standard English and not as they normally express themselves. They must be, constantly, made aware that they are writing in a language that has its own style of expression and logic. Here, their attempts are to imitate the patterns and behavior of others in language as well as consciousness. In order to help the students to understand clearly what is meant by writing in Standard English, they will be asked to write on the same topic in their regular dialect during one session, and at a subsequent date to write another essay on the same topic in Standard English. The writings will reflect many differences, and the students would not be required to make a value judgment concerning the quality of each, nor make one conform to the other, but they will be expected to understand that the Standard English writing is the type that must be developed for success in academia and the professional world.

In addition, the student will be instructed that written speech is completely different from oral speech. The content is equivalent, but the mode of expression has its own sets of rules and constraints.

Obviously, the conventional writing skills in organization, logic, and rhetorical modes must be taught to ESD students, just as one teaches Standard English speakers. However, the ESD student must be instructed in how to proofread in

Standard English. The problem is not "It don't sound right", but Is it correct according to Standard English.

In sum, to teach Standard English Composition to English as a Second Dialect students, one must recognize the existence of dialect; distinguish the dialect from Standard English; make students aware of the underlying conscious state of Standard English; present opportunity for oral practice in Standard English; indicate that writing is different from oral discourse; emphasize writing and proofreading in Standard English.